

# *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Hyde Park*



PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS  
OF ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
J. A. Krug, *Secretary*



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Newton B. Drury, *Director*

*Franklin D. Roosevelt  
and Hyde Park*



PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF

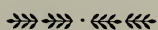
*Edward Roosevelt*



*President Roosevelt, 1936.*



# *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Hyde Park*



The Hudson River Valley was in my husband's blood. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's family owned land in and around Poughkeepsie and along the banks of the Hudson River for four generations, but even before that his Roosevelt ancestors lived just a bit farther down the Hudson River. His mother's father built a home near Newburgh, N. Y., and she grew up there; so the river in all of its aspects and the countryside as a whole were familiar and deeply rooted in my husband's consciousness.

Franklin Roosevelt was born in the old house at Hyde Park, which has since been changed somewhat, and modernized. All of his childhood was spent in the nursery on the third floor, so that from the windows he overlooked the fields and the woods between the house and the river.

He himself intended to set down on paper a complete and detailed account of the estate. However, he dictated only a few fragmentary notes in 1945, which were transcribed after his death. I think it is fitting that those fragments should be included in this booklet, so I quote them here:

"This place was part of [what was known as] the Nine Water Lots and first became a fairly large estate when a New York merchant moved here with his family [in the late eighteenth century]. . . .

"He lived at what was later known as Bellefield, now the Newbold-Morgan house. His son conceived the idea of putting a complete row of trees on both sides of the King's Highway, which was improved at about that time, though it had always been the trail between New York and Albany. Many of the trees are still growing on the side of the Highway [1945]. . . .

"During this period each of the Nine Water Lots had a road to the river and a dock. . . . The present river road from back of the stable was built by my father about 1870. The next access to the river at that time was the road called Stone Cottage Road, which started at the Newbold-Morgan place and is substantially in the

same location. These access roads from each water lot served a good part of the territory between Poughkeepsie and Hyde Park village and probably ran back to the first depth of the lots four and a half miles from the river and were used for [transporting] produce.

"Also at that time it should be noted that hay and corn were shipped in large quantities to New York City—the hay for the bus horses and later the streetcar horses. The county was known as a great corn producer, but the land gradually ran out. My farm on the Creek Road was mentioned in the 1830's as having grown the largest amount of corn per acre in Dutchess County. Lack of rotation and fertilizer soon seriously injured the producing value of all farms in this section. I think the records will show that the value per acre in this section was higher in the 1830's and 1840's than it was in the 1910 to 1920 period.

"The first family living here must have been of some prominence because the house, about 1,000 [feet] east of Mrs. James R. Roosevelt's house, was called the 'mansion' on an old map dated about 1790. This house burned down and was replaced about 1810 by the present square house of typical Hudson River architecture: the straight hall through from east to west, two rooms on one side, the dining room on the other side and a stairway and pantry on the same side. In this house the kitchen was in the basement—a rather usual custom. My brother, James R. Roosevelt, built an addition at the north end.

". . . the fields in front of my house and Mrs. James R. Roosevelt's house prove that an Indian encampment existed here before the white man came. The old oak tree in front of the Library and on the lot south of the Avenue must, of course, have grown up under field conditions and this existed only where Indians had cleared the land and cultivated it. About 1920 one of these trees got so old I had to take it down. And the rings at the base proved that it dated from about 1690. Furthermore a good many arrowheads have been found in plowing. Probably this Indian cultivation is not true of the east side of the Post Road because I can remember no similar very old trees.

"The oldest untouched forest borders the River Road from the field below the house to the swamp. It is one of the very few primeval forests on the river. It has never been lumbered and only live trees which had blown over have been cut up. The forest north of the original place has, however, been lumbered from time to time. Colonel Archibald Rogers developed the timber there on the strip between the line of the original place and the Stone Cottage Road

which was bought by me in about 1930. [It] was well developed by 1944, and I took much oak out of this for war-shipping purposes.

"About 1,000 feet north of the present railroad siding was a piece of land outside of the track and my father, who did much rowing in a wherry, built a boathouse here and during my early days I was taught to row—sometime about 1890.

"The land between James R. Roosevelt's house and the [Newbold-]Morgan house was sold to a farmer named Holbrook. [In 1826] He put up a square Hudson River type house which is today part of the main house. A series of additions were made.

"Holbrook owned the main part of the place to the river, but sold it in about 1855 to the Wheelers, she being a daughter of Mr. Boorman, the President of the New York Central, who had bought the Newbold-Morgan house.<sup>1</sup> The Wheelers added the tower on the south and a kitchen on the north. The profile of the house thus resembling a train of cars. This is the house in which I was born.

"In 1866 the original family house, Mount Hope, which is now the site of the Hudson River State Hospital, burned down while my father and his first wife were abroad. The tradition was that they had rented it during the summer to a New York family and this family's butler was thoroughly bored with the country and wished to go back to New York. He is supposed to have set the house on fire in order to return to the city. In the original Mount Hope house was the only ghost in the family.

"The tradition is that about once a year, especially when visitors were staying in the house, everybody was awakened by the sound of something like a stone cannon ball being rolled down the marble stairs. Many people heard it, including my father. It sounded as if the ball was started from the top step, gathered momentum and landed with a crash in the main hall. When the house burned down, there were found in the ruins of the cellar three stone cannon balls.

"My father inherited Mount Hope from his grandfather, James Roosevelt, in 1848 at the time of his graduation from Union College. He lived there until 1866 when the house was burned, and had started a trotting stable. When they returned from Europe they were looking for a place where they could live and maintain the stable. The Wheeler place was for sale, and my father bought it and moved the stable to it. The present carriage house was used for the driving horses, and the barn, taken down about 1910, directly below the hill was used for the brood mares. It was here in 1870 that the

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<sup>1</sup> In this instance, Mr. Roosevelt is mistaken. Holbrook sold the land to Boorman in 1843. Boorman in turn sold it to the Wheelers in 1845.



*The Roosevelt Home about 1882.*

famous Gloster was bred. . . . My father had a theory that length of stride counted in speed, and he bred primarily for this purpose. The stride of every colt was measured in the sun or on the ice of the Hudson River, where at that time much trotting was done in the winter.

"Gloster was a large horse with a record stride. No horse had ever trotted [the mile] to a high-wheeled sulky in under two minutes and twenty seconds, but Gloster established a world record which held for many years. However, it was broken as soon as the rubber-tired sulky came in. Gloster's trotting records went down and down until in 1873 he trotted [the mile] in 2.17¼. The following autumn, my father sold Gloster to a gentleman who had driven up from the station in a frock coat and silk hat and announced himself as Leland Stanford of California. My father received a record price for those days, especially for a gelding—\$15,000. . . .

"Senator Stanford shipped him out to Palo Alto and the following spring, after being conditioned, he was sent down by a freight train to San Francisco. But the train was wrecked on the way and



Gloster was killed. The stable boy who was with him . . . cut the horse's tail off and presented it to me while I was Governor in 1930. I still have it hanging in my bedroom [in the White House].

"Soon after this time my father gave up racing trotters because he felt that the game had become too crooked. I can well remember two of the old string of trotters—my father's saddle horse, 16.2 [hands high], and named Doolittle and a mare named Josie who was the regular driving horse for years.

"In the blizzard of 1888, which I remember very well, we were cut off from the farm across the road. In those days there were few refrigerating facilities and practically no canned goods. At the end of four days we had just about run out of food, and my father mounted Doolittle and finally got through the snow drifts as far as the farm gate on the Post Road. Here he was met by the farmer who had shoveled his way out on the top of the stone wall and delivered some milk, cream, cheese, eggs and a couple of chickens to my father, who managed to get back safely to the house. We finally established communications, though as I remember it, the Post Road itself was impossible to use for at least a week after the snow started.

"The main house was remodeled by my mother and myself in 1915. The central square is substantially the same except that what was known as the south parlor was cut in half. The eastern half being what my mother called 'the snugger' and the western half is the passage way from the main hall down four or five steps to the big library, occupying the stone addition. This part is fireproof. Another fireproof part was put on north of the main house and contains the servants' sitting room and my present study, which was first used as the children's school room.

"On remodeling the house the outside clapboards were removed from the original main beams. It represents a method of construction fairly common in the early nineteenth century. Between the main uprights diamond-shaped timbers were placed and inside of the diamond and the side gaps were filled with a composition of mud and hay. This is still the structure of the main part of the house. It is interesting to note that in 1915 the wood in this structure was in far better condition than the wood in the north wing, which was built about 40 years later, which at that time had to be partially renewed because you could stick a pencil through it. The tradition is that the timbers of the original house were cut on the place and are partly oak and partly white pine.

"The architect who redesigned the house in 1915 was Francis W.



*Franklin D. Roosevelt and mother in 1893.*

Hoppin of New York and the contractor was Elliott Brown, who had built many country houses. He was called 'Tiny' Brown and was center of [the] Princeton Football Team and weighed about 250 pounds.

"The room in which I was born is the southeast corner of the original tower—the one directly over the snugery. It also has been cut in half—the eastern half with the fireplace being still a bedroom and the western half part of the hallway going into the new south wing. The furniture in this room is the same as it was before. Until after my mother's death, this furniture had been moved into her room—the southeast corner of the new wing. She moved it out in 1915 and we moved it back at her request after her death."<sup>2</sup>

I first visited the old house with my parents and nurse at the age of two, in 1886, and I did not revisit it until I was seventeen, home from abroad for a summer holiday. A small addition had been made to the house before the remodeling in 1915; namely, a smoking room had been added back of the dining room. However, the fireplace never drew very well and so this was never a popular room. I never knew it to be used for anything but a storeroom for extra books and collector's items which my husband was always accumulating. The bedroom above it was a little cold in winter and exposed to the afternoon sun in summer, so that was not a popular room either!

The little addition, which was reached by going through the coat-room and which was originally our children's school room, was added to balance the new library wing. After the children grew up, my husband changed that little room into a small office for himself, and he spent many hours there working. A great many people of great importance have walked through that cloak room into the minute study, sometimes for pleasant interviews and informal talks, and sometimes, I am sure, for conversations which neither they nor my husband enjoyed.

I can remember once punishing my youngest son, who had a very violent temper, by sending him to his room. Not finding him there, I went straight to the study where I found him crying his heart out in his father's arms, with his head buried in his father's shirtfront. My husband sat tipped back in his desk chair looking entirely miserable and quite guilty because he knew he was not upholding discipline.

Hyde Park was always "home" to Franklin Roosevelt. From the

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<sup>2</sup> These notes have been edited for the sake of clarity. The original is on file at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

time he was a little boy he had a pony of his own. His father gave him his first gun and taught him how to shoot and how to carry it so as not to endanger anyone. He knew every tree, every rock and stream on the place, and never forgot the people who had worked there when he was small. He often told me anecdotes about them. He always had a dog of his own, and there were often one or two more on the place. He had a garden, and he was always building things—houses in the old pine trees which served every purpose and were sometimes ships going to sea, and shelters down in the woods where they played Indians. The Rogers boys played with him most of the time; his half brother's two children, Taddy and Helen, were about his age and next-door neighbors, as was Mary Newbold. They were all constant companions.

In spite of these neighbors, Franklin was alone a great deal of the time with his father and mother, and never without a governess, or a tutor, and regular hours of school work.

Both his father and mother enjoyed traveling, and traveled a great deal, so that he became very familiar with England and the European Continent. He stayed with his parents' friends in England. He hunted with his father in Biarritz one winter. He went to school for several semesters in Nauheim over the years when his father took the heart cure there. It was in Nauheim that he first came to know how young German boys were trained in school.

After the yearly cure in Nauheim, they went to the Black Forest for an after-cure. Franklin took me on our wedding trip to these well-known and beloved places. It was here, I think, that he first became so interested in the care of trees. These forests were so beautifully kept. When the trees matured they were cut in certain areas and, as they were cut, new trees were planted. He pointed out to me how every twig was gathered up in winter for firewood by the peasants and how beautifully cared-for and cultivated the forests were.

Franklin and his parents came back to Campobello Island in New Brunswick, Canada, for a month, or 6 weeks, every summer after the spring and early summer spent in Europe. Here he learned to sail and developed his love of the sea, but he always looked forward to the month of September and return to his beloved Hyde Park.

My husband did not go away to school until he was 14. The year before he went away, he shot one specimen of every bird he found around the Hyde Park place, and that collection is still on the shelves of the sunken bookcase to the left of the front door as you enter the house. He stuffed many of the birds himself, and found it





*Franklin D. Roosevelt and father at Campobello about 1900.*

not always a very pleasant avocation, but he stuck to it just the same.

His nurse, "Mamie," was with him from babyhood until he had to have a governess, and he loved her all his life. That did not prevent his playing tricks on her. Once he came near to really hurting her. At the top of the narrow stairs, down which she carried his supper tray, he stretched a string, and she stumbled over it and fell with the dishes, fortunately down only a few steps. She was badly shaken up, but no serious harm was done. However, young Franklin was severely punished by his parents.

A second old employee has passed away long since. She was a Scotch woman, Elspeth McEachern. She was in the house when we went to Hyde Park the day of our wedding, and she looked me over critically and appraisingly, wondering if I could come up to her



*Portrait of Franklin D. Roosevelt taken in London 1918.*

expectations as the wife of "her boy."

The gardener, William Plog, who is now in the service of the United States Government, knew my husband as a young man; and Charles Van Curan, Louis Depew, and Robert McGaughey were all with Mrs. James Roosevelt a good many years before she died, but there are no people left on the place who knew my husband as a boy. I think the person in the neighborhood who has known him the longest is an old friend with whom he loved to discuss Dutchess County history, Mr. Benjamin Haviland. He is a farmer living on the East Park Road, and some of his gifts enrich the collection of tools and implements found in the library.

The county of Dutchess, in which Hyde Park is situated, is politically a Republican county, but Franklin's father was a Democrat. He was a Lincoln Republican during the War Between the States, but returned to his traditional party, and so it was natural that when the county politicians were looking for a candidate to make an impossible campaign in 1910, they decided to ask young Franklin D.



*A Roosevelt family group in 1919. Left to right are Anna, Franklin Jr., Mr. Roosevelt, James, Mrs. Roosevelt, John, and Elliott.*



Roosevelt if he would run for the State Senate. I doubt if anyone thought he had a chance, and I can remember now how painfully worried I was over the first speeches in the county. When a long pause came, I wondered whether he would ever go on. He always did. He worked so hard and visited so many people, and, as it happened to be a Democratic landslide, he was elected and went to Albany, the first Democratic State Senator in 32 years. The last one had been Thomas Newbold, our next-door neighbor, who gave my husband good advice from his past experience.

From that time on, and throughout his whole life, Hyde Park was always the base of operations. He came and went. One summer we took a house in New Jersey on the shore, but it was the last summer we ever tried to commute. We went "home" in the autumn, and I could see what a relief it was, even though he had to travel back and forth to New York City on business and could only come up for week ends.

During his father's life, the home and place at Hyde Park were carefully run, and everything about them was well done. There was no extravagance, and his father must have been an excellent manager. After his death, Franklin's mother wanted to keep doing exactly what her husband had done. The home was hers, but she could not sell it without Franklin's consent. She never wanted to sell it, and I think she liked to feel that we were going to stay living there for generations to come; but my husband knew that after his death that would be impossible.

After Franklin had infantile paralysis at Campobello, his mother tried very hard to get him to return to Hyde Park to live permanently, feeling he should no longer try to work and that the country would afford him more interests. It is true that he always went back to Hyde Park for rest and peace and strength, but he had broader interests. I do not think he would ever have been content unless he had been doing something in a wider field than that of a country squire, retiring to live a life of ease on his estate. He loved the land and bought land contiguous to his mother's, going straight back over the top of the hill, so that when he died he owned almost the area covering two of the original old water lots. He rented most of the farm land for just enough to cover the cost of taxes and insurance. His love of trees led him to start his Christmas tree plantations. He put most of the land under the supervision of the forestry department of Syracuse University and followed Prof. Nelson Brown's advice in his forestry experiments. Together they developed plantations of many varieties of trees.





*Eleanor Roosevelt.*



*Hyde Park as it appears today.*

Fortunately for my husband, ever since his childhood he had had many hobbies, and these stood him in good stead when he was first recuperating from infantile paralysis. He collected stamps as a young boy, so his mother gave him her interesting collection. He collected books about the American Navy, models of ships, letters dealing with the Navy, collections of miniature children's books, first editions of various kinds—in fact, there was always some new hobby with which he could pass away endless hours. At one time he built little sailing ships and held races on the river with the boys and various friends. Mr. Ralph C. Cropley was one of those who took great interest in ship models, and my husband was always interested in his work.

Franklin always had a horse to ride, and there were always two or three horses in the stable even after the first automobiles came in. Our children were never without horses and dogs as their pets when they were at home; and while we left the horses when we went to

Campobello, I have taken many trips with birds, rabbits, and dogs, as well as five children.

Franklin's mother never allowed him to interfere with the running of the place at Hyde Park, or the farm, but the woodland was his and he ran that as his own, even though her men often helped his men in the busy seasons. Mr. Plog, as head man on her place, always looked after the little trees and helped set them out until Franklin found Mr. Russel A. Linaka, an old Navy man, who finally took over charge of the trees.

After we went to the White House, the big house at Hyde Park became more of an official residence and at times we brought extra people to help his mother's employees because of the large number of guests who followed the President, and the extra staff that must come with him; but the manner of life changed very little.

Today the way of life in the big houses is changed greatly, because they were patterned somewhat after the way of life in big houses in Great Britain or on the Continent. Many of the people who came here as immigrants had lived in those houses abroad, and, with slight modifications, they found themselves at home in the big houses over here.

My mother-in-law had a regular staff of cook, kitchen maid, personal maid, house maid, waitress or butler, as the case might be, a houseman, a laundress who came by the day from her own cottage on the place, a coachman, and a chauffeur. When we arrived with five small children there often were a tutor, or governess, a nurse, and a nursemaid. This seems utterly ridiculous in the light of present-day conditions, but you could have three maids then for what you have to pay in wages for one today.

Some time before my mother-in-law's death she had begun to curtail, and it was only because my husband could bring people from Washington that the old-fashioned type of hospitable living could go on. Curiously enough, I am not sure that we are not going back to some of the pattern of living which existed in the days of our great-grandmothers. People who did not have slaves in those days, obtained help by inviting the daughters of their neighbors to come in to be trained to run a house and help the lady of the house with the work that was needed. There was a premium on being a good housekeeper.

In the 1930's, Franklin became conscious of the fact that no private home could ever hold, or should ever hold, the interesting collections of various kinds which had come to him while he was the President, in addition to the things which he had personally col-





*The Dining Room. President Roosevelt's chair stands before his place at the table.*

lected. The war made him realize that one should not put things of historical interest, and papers of value historically, all in one place. Modern war could, with one bomb, destroy the Congressional Library with all the records of the past generations. He wanted his own papers and those of this period to be available to historians in the near future. He talked it over with a number of friends and historians and evolved the idea of giving a piece of land at Hyde Park on which a library could be erected which would be given to the Government of the United States. This was done, and then my husband told me he had decided to leave the house, and the land immediately around it, to the United States Government. Of course, he left us the option of living there until our children died, or until we ourselves gave it to the Government.

The place he looked upon as the most beautiful was the rose garden, in which his mother always, up to the last few years of her life, picked her own roses, and this was where he wished to be buried.





*Dresden Room. The formal parlor is little changed from the days when President Roosevelt's mother first came to the Home.*

Many people in looking at the house will think the furniture old-fashioned, and they will be right, for it was good furniture when it was built and fortunately none of the people who lived in the house ever had the desire to change it because of some whim of passing taste. If one keeps things long enough, taste usually changes and returns to them! The old mahogany, which people scorned at one period and painted white, has in many cases had the paint scraped off and been refinished with infinite care some years later. That never happened to anything in the big house at Hyde Park.

For many years my husband used in his bedroom a double bed which had belonged in the house of his godmother, Miss Nellie Blodgett. She gave it to my mother-in-law, and my husband always slept in it. It is there today. In his bedroom, Fala had a chair, and there were always photographs of members of the family hung on the walls.

One thing I remember that particularly pleased my mother-in-law

when the King and Queen of England stayed in the house was the fact that they were completely delighted to find in the King's room some old-fashioned prints that were exactly the same as those he had been brought up with in his mother's house. Of course, these prints had been bought by my husband's father in England at approximately the same time probably that the King's mother had acquired hers.

As a young man, my husband used the little room at the top of the first flight of stairs. He hung many of his school and college diplomas and pictures in there. Each of our boys used that room in turn, graduating from the third floor, where the children slept, down to the second floor when they were the eldest son at home.

The nursery was always the nursery and was still used in that way for our grandchildren. The youngest members of the family always found their cribs and their own little table and chairs in that room. They used the big roof outside as a playground. My daughter's children, who are the only grandchildren who really remember the old house very well, used that room also, and only a short time ago questioned me carefully as to whether certain things that they remembered were still there.

I am always glad that we were able to leave the rooms exactly as they had been, since my husband asked in his memorandum to me that we take out only what we could use and that we leave the house, if possible, looking "lived in."

The front porch has memories of a very particular kind, for this is where my husband always stood with his mother to greet important guests. It is where she always met him when he arrived for a visit, and on this porch he stood when his friends and neighbors came to congratulate him after each nomination and on every election night.

I think Franklin realized that the historic library, the house, and the peaceful resting place behind the high hedge, with flowers blooming around it, would perhaps mean something to the people of the United States. They would understand the rest and peace and strength which he had gained here and perhaps learn to come, and go away with some sense of healing and courage themselves. If this place serves this purpose, it will fulfill, I think, the desire which was nearest my husband's heart when he gave the place to the Government.

PHOTOGRAPHIC CREDITS:

*Frontispiece* (New York Times)

*A Roosevelt family group in 1919* (Fabian Bachrach)

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## HOME OF FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Pursuant to a joint resolution of the Congress of July 18, 1939, the home of Franklin D. Roosevelt was designated as a national historic site on January 15, 1944, with the President's immediate family retaining life interests in the home and the 33.23 acres included in the site. After the death of the President, Mrs. Roosevelt and the children waived their life interests, and full title to the area was accepted by the Secretary of the Interior on November 21, 1945. The Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site was dedicated April 12, 1946, the first anniversary of the President's death. It is now administered by the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior.

